

the BARD OBSERVER

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A TRULY GRAND OPENING FOR CCS MUSEUM

by Sara Frier

THE whirlwind opening of the long-awaited Hessel Museum heralded Bard’s remarkable commitment to fearless art. On November 11th and 12th, the Center for Curatorial Studies welcomed hundreds of visitors to its brand new facility with a rich program of speeches, performances and presentations supplementing its bold inaugural exhibition, *Wrestle*. The weekend celebrated CCS Bard becoming the permanent home for Marieluise Hessel’s vast contemporary art collection, an invaluable resource for the college and its surrounding area.

The opening weekend began with a VIP event on Saturday at 6pm. Benefactors, CCS graduates and friends of the college were invited to preview the inaugural show, presented in the new 17,000 square-foot Hessel Museum addition. Each received a CCS commemorative bag, filled with two copies of the innovative show catalog and a unique publication entitled *A Witness to Her Art*. Following a performance by British conceptualist Martin Creed with the Bard Conservatory of Music—the orchestra curiously arranged in single-file through the CCS Atrium— guests sipped champagne and roamed the exhibition, often stopping to chat with Ms. Hessel and an animated Leon Botstein.

Sunday marked the official opening of the Hessel Museum, and the public came in droves—many on charter busses from New York - to witness the brief ceremony. After remarks by President Botstein, CCS Executive Director Tom Eccles, and Hessel herself, the beribboned glass doors were flung open and the exuberant visitors poured in. Later, guests received bright yellow “*Wrestle*” T-shirts, nibbled white chocolate stamped with the CCS logo, and were invited to attend a panel discussion addressing the exhibition itself. Many wore looks of near-disbelief at the stunning collection, housed so intimately in the woods of Annandale.

Indeed, the Hessel Museum is a grand addition to a history of cultural excellence. It is the newest addition to the Center for Curatorial Studies and Art in Contemporary Culture, which includes a graduate school founded on the generosity of

Ms. Hessel and Richard Black in 1990. Since then, it has turned out over 100 well-placed curators and scholars, who continuously reexamine the potential of exhibition and context in art. Expanded in 2006, the Center includes advanced storage facilities, classrooms, a vast library and archive, exhibition galleries, and the Museum itself. It is to permanently house

Ms. Hessel’s collection of over 1700 contemporary works, which range from the 1960s to the present. In the future, distinguished guests and curatorial students alike may draw on the important collection for their shows.

As a collector, Hessel has a unique open-mindedness to contemporary art. Her bold choices are personal, and far exceed the status of mere investments—when asked about her decisions, she simply replied, “I always try to get something that touches me profoundly...being politically correct is unfamiliar to me.” Indeed, Hessel demonstrated a truly personal relationship with her collection. At one point, while explaining Gabriel Orozco’s installation of rusted cans placed gracefully in a pile of sand on the floor, she simply picked up one of the cans, did a little show-and-tell, and stuck it back in. She emphasized Bard as an institution renowned for its own innovative attitude towards the arts: “ [The museum is meant] to bring difficult art alive here, art that will have a lot of trouble getting shown at a more conservative museum space.”

Wrestle, the inaugural show co-curated by Eccles and guest Trevor Smith, also featured works that, according to Eccles, “inform unexpected juxtapositions that in some cases bridge decades of artistic evolution...two curators continuously responding to the other’s moves on the game board of the Museum.” Indeed, the famous likes of Sol LeWitt and Cindy

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Sherman stood gracefully alongside more obscure names; moving far beyond mere impressiveness, the show concerned itself with the work and viewing experience. Yayoi Kusama’s, delicate abstract 1962 Basket Sculpture neighbored Felix Gonzales-Torres’ 2005 *Para un Hombre in Uniforme* (For a Man in Uniform)—a diminishing 220-lb. pile of red, white and blue lollipops, meant for the taking. Soundtracks of multiple video installations shrieked, lectured and warbled among paintings by Sigmar Polke and Christopher Wool, photos by Sherman and Robert Mapplethorpe, and countless others. The brave mixture of media, artists and presentation truly pandered to nobody; rather, the innovative, aggressive nature of work and show seemed best represented by a Wool painting of the words, “AND IF YOU DON’T LIKE IT YOU CAN GET THE FUCK OUT OF MY HOUSE.”

In an art world where boundaries are endlessly redefined, the Hessel collection will be continually reworked into different contexts. Its presence at Bard evokes the college’s continuous commitment to the arts and to experimentation. As Hessel herself concluded, “This is where Bard can make a difference.”

The CCS Hessel Museum is open Wednesday-Sunday, 1-5 pm, between Blithewood and Avery Film. Free and open to the public. ➡

Democrats Claim Sweeping Victory

How Much Will Actually Change?

by Jason Mastbaum

AS of Wednesday, Nov. 15, the 110th Congress will convene with a 51-49 Democratic-Republican split in the Senate, and a 229-196 split in the House that is also in the Democrats’ favor (ten seats are still undecided). This is the first time in twelve years that the Democrats will have control of both houses of Congress.

First, some facts about how things went down locally are in order. Jonathan Becker has given me his best estimate of the number of Bard students registered in Barrytown as compared to how many voted, which he put at roughly 300 out of 450. 66% is great compared to the national turnout for 18-24 year olds, which was in the mid-20s. It certainly helped that, as Becker said, “The local Republican Party officials made a conscious choice not to challenge Bard students.” Especially considering how tight a race it was between incumbent John Sweeney and Kirsten Gillibrand, it just goes to show that voting can make a difference.

Despite the apparent interest in the election, however, there doesn’t seem to be much talk, either on-campus or in the national media, as to what the actual consequences of the Election Day results will be.

The main point to keep in mind is that the Democrats have too narrow a margin in both houses of Congress to push through whatever they want. In the Senate, this is because they do not have the 60-vote supermajority needed to end a filibuster. Now that the Republicans will be in the minority in the Senate, however narrowly, they are very likely to start vetoing Democratic legislation.

The other problem arising from the Democrats’ narrow lead in Congress is that even if they manage to get their legislation through, President Bush can still veto it. This would kill all but the most popular legislation, because the Democrats would not be able to muster up two-thirds majorities in both houses to override a veto.

Now that the procedural problems for the Democrats have been taken care of, it is important to take a look at the Democrats’ track record to try and get a sense of what they are actually going to do. Over the past few years, we have seen some votes that had anywhere from a few to most Democrats on what would have been considered the “Republican” side of the issue. On the USA PATRIOT ACT, the Senate voted 98-11 in

Continued on page 3



INSIDE

Look at these articles

- » Story of Mesfin Woldemariam--3
- » Debating Islam and Homosexuality--5
- » Lydia Davis Interview--8
- » Highlights from *Wrestle*--8
- » *Juvies* Movie Review--9

MAT Program in the Bronx

by Kevin Powell

BARD has established a growing presence in the South Bronx. "Bard in the Bronx," an ongoing effort, orchestrated by the MAT program and currently in its third year, seeks to improve and revolutionize a cluster of struggling South Bronx high schools.

"We were pretty much asked and invited to come into these schools," explained Ann Gabler, Associate Director of the MAT program. "These are especially hands-on principals, and we really see this as a collaborative effort—very much a joint design process." The program incorporates several goals, among them, creating an empowerment zone in New York City by establishing schools with greater autonomy from the New York City Board of Ed, the primary purpose of which is allowing principals more freedom to choose their faculty.

The cluster itself is composed of several relatively new public high schools of about 500 students each. The area is high-need, with one-hundred percent of the students qualifying for free lunches. "These are vibrant neighborhoods," remarked Gabler, "and once you have 500 students in a school and more faculty than you can fit in a room, it always has a very strong impact."

The program is still in its early stages, and consists at the moment of monthly meetings with high school principals to discuss different objectives. The MAT program has also completed its first intensive year of training with faculty, which included a summer program that brought working teachers to the Bard campus. Each teacher must also undertake a research project that requires them to question their basic assumptions about learning. Moreover, 18 out of the Bard MAT program's 48 students are to finish their teaching program through practice at these schools in anticipation of employment.

“The program really emphasizes the idea that teachers should be representatives of the subject they’re teaching,” said Ric Campbell, Director of the MAT program and a veteran of over twenty years teaching in the classroom. “The attrition rate in NYC schools is horrendous; if we can partner with a cluster of schools and develop a system that is attractive to teachers—and keeps these teachers—then we will have an opportunity to turn these schools around.”

The effort demands a specific kind of commitment from a teacher, especially one who wishes to remain active in his or her academic field. "Salary is a piece," explained Campbell,

who adds that the program boosts financial incentives, “but it’s only one piece. There is also a strong sense of belonging to a community that holds your values, shares your goals, and sees them as attainable.” Another concern is to ensure that students manage to meet the educational standards imposed by the Board of Education and demanded on standardized tests. While Bard may be known for thumbing its nose at the latter, the program does not overlook the need to establish and improve basic literary and problem-solving skills. “The reason to learn the basics is for their intrinsic value,” said Campbell. “If our teaching of skills is embedded in the things that really energize learning, then teaching such skills becomes considerably easier.” The essential goal is to create a link between secondary schools and higher education, in which the Liberal Arts are applied engagingly in a high school setting.

"I think it holds up fabulously well," commented Campbell. "If, rather than just opening a textbook, you really invite your students into authentic intellectual work and problems that are sophisticated, challenging, and interesting, they will want to participate."

The program has years to continue, and the focus at the moment is on training, hiring, and keeping teachers while raising grant funds. "We're extremely optimistic, given the expansion of the program," says Gabler, "So many of our graduates have taken jobs in New York City public schools and are continuing to work with us so that we've established a solid presence there." The MAT program will discuss the effort at an open house, to be held December 2nd. 🖊



Cross Country What?

by Grace Dwyer

MENTION the word “sports” at Bard and the response is hardly what one could call enthusiastic. Typical reactions range from twitching to averted eyes to a frank and unapologetic indifference. This fall, however, Bard’s cross-country team is something to pay attention to. Not only did the Raptors come in second in the annual NEAC championship, but the team “swept” two meets (a runner came in first for both boys and girls) for the first time in Bard history. In spite of these victories and a record-setting season, Bard runners remain in the periphery of campus consciousness. Many students are actually unaware of their existence. As NEAC Runner of the Year, first-year Aaron Ahlstrom recounted, “[The team] ran by some people once and they were like ‘What is this? What’s going on?’ And we were like ‘It’s cross country.’”

Ahlstrom and other first-year additions were part of the explanation for the team's unprecedented success this fall, in addition to an "incredible coach" and a solid base of returning upperclassmen, including women's cross-country NEAC Runner of the Year Mieke Woelky, Charles Barnes, and others. Why do they run when the rewards are so few? Ahlstrom explained his motivation for running at a school where athletes are often viewed with, at best, bewilderment. "I'm addicted. I do it for the runner's high. Running is really relaxing; it gives you a really nice peace of mind. I just like being by myself for long hours, and thinking things out."

A serious runner since his sophomore year in high school, Ahlstrom was not always so fleet-footed. "I used to be a terrible runner. It changed when I crossed the line to where it became enjoyable to run long distances. Running at first feels really stupid -it hurts- but once you get past that and accept its ridiculous nature, it's awesome." Ahlstrom plans to run track in the spring, and continue running through his four years at Bard. "In high school I ran just for myself. Here I felt like I was on a team. It's a nice community to be in."

Bard running aficionados need not wait until cross-country next fall to get started. This spring marks the induction of a track club, founded by the cross-country coach, that will compete with the clubs of other colleges. Anyone is free to join. 🏃

Amnesty International Write-A-Thon

Dec 8th: 7 - 9 PM and
Dec 10th: 2 - 5 PM

Join activists around the globe for the 2006 Write-A-Thon campaign. Amnesty's Urgent Action letters have been of help to dozens of people around the world. Stop by the meeting room (2nd floor of the campus center) any time during the hours listed above and take 3 minutes to fill out and address a letter in protest of human rights issue of your choice!

Holiday Card Action Campaign

Dec 2nd: 2 - 6 PM and
Dec 3rd: 12 - 4 PM in the CC

Send a message of encouragement and well wishes to a political prisoner this holiday season! Decorate your own postcard and write a brief message to remind prisoners of conscience that you're thinking of them. All cards must be strictly non-religious and non-political. For those who don't want to decorate their own cards, pre-made postcards will be available for you to write a message on. It only takes a few minutes, and it might mean a lot to someone!

Trans Activist Debra Davis Speaks at Bard

by Michael Brown

TRANSGENDER activist and educator Debra Davis came to Bard this past Saturday, Nov. 11 to give a presentation and answer questions about her own transition, as well as the state of human rights for the Trans community as a whole.

She worked for 32 years as a librarian at Southwest High School just outside Minneapolis in one of the most conservative districts in the country. Finally, in 1998, she came to the decision in 1998 to come out to her co-workers, even though at the time the laws protecting trans individuals against discrimination were vague and mostly ineffective. Of the six other people who had tried to make the transition while employed by a public school system in the United States, all six had been fired immediately with no legal recourse.

Davis explained her reasoning, "I decided I needed to be just one person." She added, "Every day I had to get up in the morning and crossdress as a man to go to work." She informed her principal of her decision, offering to make the transition in such a way that would best inform everyone involved. A faculty meeting was called where teachers were taught some basics about being transgendered, and they were then given materials to discuss in homeroom the following week.

When Davis arrived at school the next Monday, she officially was Debra Davis, the woman, in all communities and capacities. After raising two children in a happy marriage, and after years of being known as being one of the manliest of men, even to those very close to her, of working for sports programming networks such as ESPN and NBC Sports, she finally concluded a transition that had taken more than half her life to fully come to terms with.

She associated the fact that it had taken her so long to

come out about her true nature in part because of the historical taboo surrounding being trans, causing herself and others to suppress their inclinations.

Trans individuals are actually much more common than commonly perceived. According to the University of Minnesota Program of Sexuality, 1.5% of the population is transgendered, and 23% of partners of a transgendered individual are unaware of that fact. The lack of societal support often has often lead to cases of depression and alienation. The same study suggests that 50% of trans individuals attempt suicide, and 17% of Trans people successfully commit suicide.

Davis, however, received a slightly unexpected welcome from her students at Southwest High. Some were perplexed, others more supportive, but she was very much relieved to see that the students were so accepting of difference. The faculty was a different story altogether. An especially conservative faculty member called the police on two occasions when seeing Davis exit the women's bathroom, and eventually filed a lawsuit with the sponsorship of the Christian Family Coalition and Pat Robertson's American Center of Law & Justice. The faculty member claimed that Davis had "violated her religious rights to privacy." In a watershed decision of *Cruzan v. Minneapolis Public School Board*, Davis won the case in the Federal Court of Appeals. The decision said that if you have you are uncomfortable with a Transgendered individual, it is your responsibility to find another bathroom.

Four years later, now that she has retired from her job as a librarian, Davis will continue to tour to interested schools, aiming to educate students, politicians, and anyone else who is interested in learning about a group of people that is too often silenced and misunderstood. 🗑️

Elections, Continued from page 1

favor—the lone dissenter was Russ Feingold, and there was one senator listed as “not voting.” On the Military Commissions Act of 2006 (“the torture bill”), 10 Democrats voted “yea,” including Democrats Lieberman and Menendez (Chafee was the only Republican who voted against it, for the curious reader). The point is, that whatever the Democrats are currently claiming, they are not exactly a fountain of new ideas looking to radically upset the current political order. Radical change is especially unlikely considering that a lot of the incoming Democrats in both houses are moderate to conservative.

Finally, it is not even a guarantee that anything much is going to get done in the next two years. This is because in the House, razor-thin majorities are still functional, so the Democrats are going to seize on the opportunity to subpoena the administration, especially in regards to Iraq.

In a Time magazine article dated October 29, a Bush staffer is quoted as saying that “a cataclysmic fight to the death” will ensue if the White House is “confronted with congressional subpoenas it deems inappropriate.” Neither side will have the power to outright win such a brawl, so gridlock would ensue. The reporters who cover politics, if nobody else, will have something to look forward to the next two years. ➡

Unofficial 2006 Election Results from Barrytown

House of Representatives
Republican: John E. Sweeney - 58
Democrat: Kirsten E. Gillibrand – 444 (winner)

U.S. Senate
Republican: John Spencer - 57
Democrat: Hillary Clinton – 383 (winner)
Green: Howie Hawkins – 52

Governor
Republican: John J. Faso - 53
Democrat: Eliot Spitzer – 429 (winner)
Green: Malachy McCourt - 28

State Controller
Republican: J. Christopher Callaghan - 63
Democrat: Alan G. Hevesi – 378 (winner)

Attorney General
Republican: Jeanine Pirro – 60
Democrat: Andrew M. Cuomo – 390 (winner)

NYS Senate
Republican: Stephen M. Saland – 82 (winner)
Democrat: Brian Keeler – 406

NYS Assembly
Republican: Marcus Molinaro – 115 (winner)
Democrat: Virginia S. Martin - 374

Bard Students at Regional Amnesty International Conference

The Story of Ethiopian Political Prisoner Mesfin Woldemariam

by Frank Brancely



ON Nov. 1 of last year, Mesfin Woldemariam, a 76-year-old Ethiopian man dressed in pajamas hurriedly made his way to meet an unexpected, violent banging on his front door. According to Amnesty International, a Human-Rights organization, men dressed in dark police uniforms promptly declared the man under arrest for “outrage against the Constitution,” “obstruction of the exercise of constitutional powers,” “inciting, organizing, or leading armed rebellion” and “attempted genocide,” all in direct connection to demonstrations against election fraud in the Ethiopian elections of May 2005. As of Wednesday, Nov. 16, it has been 380 days since his arrest.

Professor Mesfin Woldemariam, an Ethiopian citizen, graduate and honoree of Clark and Harvard Universities, and one of the most prominent human rights activists in Africa, felt very much inspired after reading some of the same texts our first-year students are currently engaging in. He felt emboldened and decided to return from the US, where he had been furthering his education, to his home country to promote fundamental values of human freedom. He explains: “For me, a life will have meaning only if you are involved. A life without involvement is really no life at all. We become human beings when we become aware of those who are below us.” Amnesty International described Professor Woldemariam as, “a retired geography professor who taught for many years at Addis Ababa University” (AI website) was awarded by the New York Academy of Sciences in September of 2006 its honorary Heinz R. Pagel Award “in recognition and in promoting human rights, civil society, and a peaceful transition to democracy.”

Upon his return to Ethiopia he took part in protests against the current regime, Meles Zenawi’s Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which has held power since 1991. These protests took place when two opposition coalitions challenged the outcome of the most recent national

Professor Mesfin Woldemariam, an Ethiopian citizen, graduate and honoree of Clark and Harvard Universities, and one of the most prominent human rights activists in Africa

election. Groups that had originally been appointed to monitor the elections were actually not allowed to do so on the day of the election, leaving the results unmonitored and highly contested. After the National Election Board announced preliminary results in early June 2005 that indicated a slim lead for the EPRDF, peaceful demonstrations led to violent confrontations with security forces. More than 80 supporters of the political opposition were killed by security forces, and tens of thousands of people were detained without charge, among them Professor Woldemariam. While many detainees have since been released,

thousands, including Mesfin, remain in indefinite detention without legal charge or trial.

Ethiopia is not unfamiliar with human rights abuses. In the past, as AI states, “Journalists have been jailed for carrying out their professional duties, and the government has sought to replace the leadership of the Ethiopian Free Press Journalists Association with pro-government allies. Lawyers, teachers and other civil society activists have been harassed, prosecuted or imprisoned.” To combat this unfortunate reality, Mesfin founded the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) in 1991, a “non-governmental organization that investigates and reports on human rights violations in Ethiopia,” the same year that the EPRDF gained power. At the beginning, the government permitted EHRCO to operate unbothered, but this soon changed. In June 2005, after Professor Mesfin resigned as the chair of EHRCO to focus



his energies temporarily on the election campaign, authorities seized at the opportunity to dismantle the organization and detained six EHRCO staff members for several weeks.

Bard human rights activists traveled to Boston University last Friday, Nov. 10, to take part in the Amnesty International Regional Conference, exploring activism on the local, national, and global level. At BU, Bard students eagerly listened to

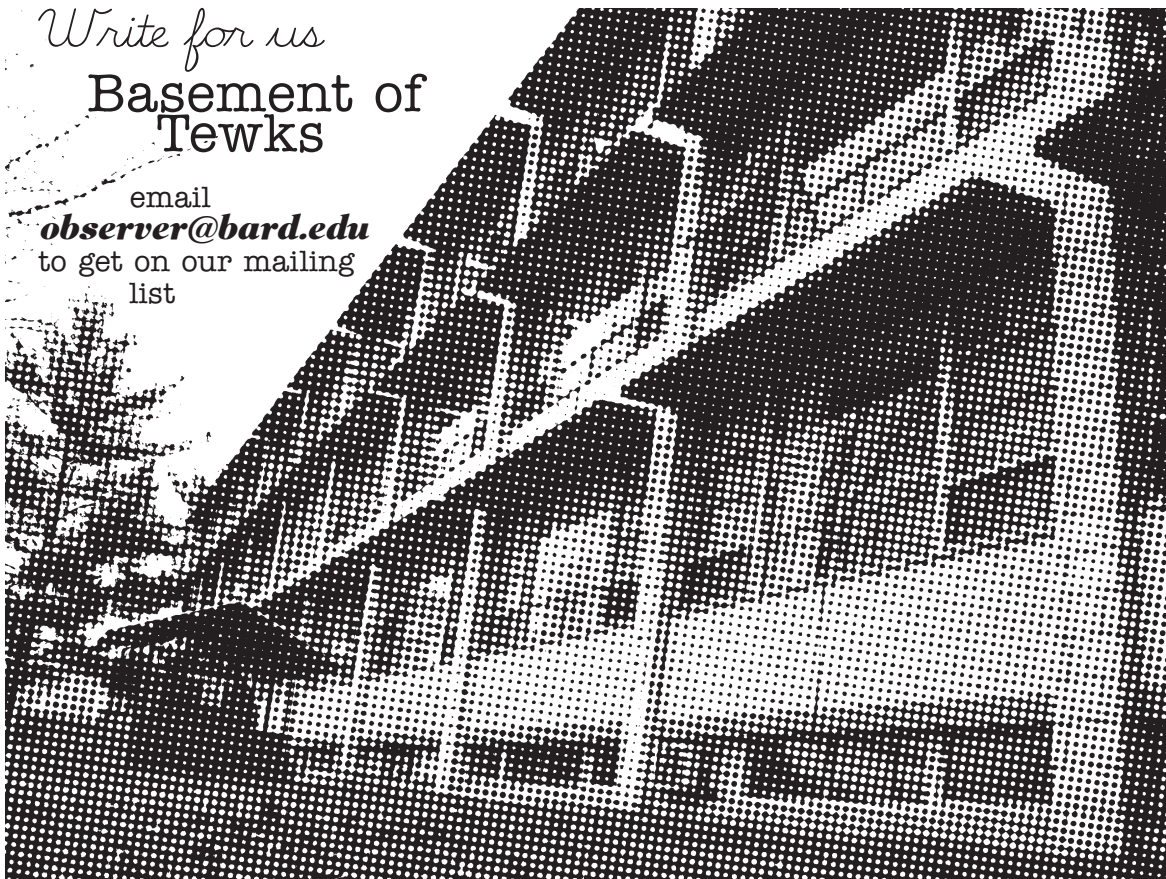
Dr. Meqdes Mesfin, Professor Mesfin Woldemariam’s daughter, as she related the emotional account of her father’s detention and present condition. “I bring you the truth about my father and about my people,” she declared to an attentive audience. Looking at an image of her father on the screen behind her, she clarified, “I think it’s important to note that my father does not look like he does in the photo behind me,” explaining that after his many hardships “he looks much older, and now walks with a cane.” On August 18th of this year, Professor Mesfin collapsed in his prison cell, reportedly suffering with pneumonia, which “is likely to have been caused by the harsh conditions in which he has been held.” He was treated at Addis Ababa’s Police Hospital but then had to return to Kaliti Prison, where he was no longer able to access adequate medical treatment, even though, according to AI, his “condition still remains serious and potentially life-threatening.” He had also been ill to the point of being confined to bed for back and leg problems before his arrest, “for which he has reportedly received no medical treatment at Kaliti Prison.”

Professor Mesfin and others held at Kaliti have refused to appear in court in an attempt to express indignation against the baseless charges brought against them. If convicted of the alleged crimes, the Professor might very well receive the death penalty. While hope remains for his release, it is doubtful such action will be quick. A small student-run chapter of Amnesty International was started a few months ago at Bard and has actively engaged in work to free Professor Mesfin, including petitions, letter-writing campaigns, bake-sales, film screenings, teach-ins, with lectures hopefully soon to come, including potentially arrangements for Professor Mesfin’s daughter to speak at Bard.

Amnesty International is the world’s largest grassroots human rights organization, with 1.5 million members in 162 countries. AI details the history of the organization, “In the 40 years since it’s founding, Amnesty International members have helped free more than 40,000 people who were unjustly imprisoned. In 1977, the organization was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for its work to protect human rights.” Bard Amnesty members meet every Monday night at 9:30 in the yellow room of the Student Center and discuss a variety of current human rights related issues including air torture, Guantanamo Bay, human rights abuse in post-Soviet Russia, child-soldiers, arms trafficking, human trafficking, the campaign to Save Darfur, human rights abuse against GLBTQ world-citizens, organized prevention of violence against women, and several other active concerns. The group wants to build as large a community of students and faculty on campus as possible, hoping to attract people who are concerned with issues like these and are willing to dedicate time and energy to make real changes in an imperfect world. ➡

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Brazil Re-Elects President

A Brazilian Student's Take

by Camila Geld

WHEN I was younger and began to take an interest in what this “politics” that people would get so carried away with over the big family lunches, the first things I remember learning were bleak. When I was seven years old, our President resigned amid scandalous corruption charges that were most likely true. Before that, the country had been under a twenty-year military dictatorship that ended in 1985. The mayor of my city, Sao Paulo, from 1993 to 1996 was so “allegedly” corrupt, that his name is now a verb for “to steal public money”. I went to middle school with his grandchildren and they were very annoying. Needless to say, I was disenchanted with politics from a young age.

Sick of this cycle of extremely well educated, wealthy and privileged men running Brazil, a country that has a ridiculously disproportionate division of wealth the Brazilian populace re-elected Luiz Inacio Lula da Silvav, commonly known as Lula, on October 29th to serve as its president for four more years. Lula is seen as the friend of the common man, being that he is, or at least was, a common man himself. Presidente Lula is one of eight children of illiterate parents and he quit school after fourth grade and started working. When he was 19 he lost a finger in an accident at an automobile parts factory, spawning many jokes about how he cannot count past nine. He became involved in left-leaning trade unions, and in 1980, joined a group of academics, union leaders and intellectuals in creating the

Partido dos Trabalhadores, (PT), the Workers Party. When looking to his past, it is easy to see how he was elected to the Presidency in the first place. The vote is mandatory in Brazil, with every single citizen over the age of 18 required to cast a vote. The poor people all over the country are sick of being overlooked by privileged and educated, and immediately identified with Lula and his common background. They felt that because he was one of them, he would do more to help them than any other.

In all honesty, I do not know much of what Lula did with his first term as President. Most other countries were afraid that he would lead Brazil down an extremely leftist path, like Chavez. This suspicion led to a crash in the market devaluing the Real (the national currency) and put the economy in a state of considerable upheaval. However, although he works with a leftist party, the government is not an ideological one, and has taken a moderate to liberal stance on the state of affairs, putting international minds at ease and helping to right the economy. He has installed social programs in the country and has done lots of work to build international trade and friendships. His party has seriously tightened gun control and raised a tremendous amount of money for the FOME ZERO (no hunger) program to feed people living beneath the poverty line, among other things. One reason for his diplomatic successes is his experience as a union leader. Famously, one of the first things he did was buy a private plane to jet around the world in. Recently though, his party has been plagued with charges of corruption, most of which turned out to be at least somewhat true. Last year, leading right up to the elections, I heard many different and scandalous tales of his corrupt comrades. One fellow was caught with a significant amount of cash hidden in his underwear. He claimed ignorance and innocence in all cases.

In light of all this, I could understand why the more politically involved of my friends were thrilled that Lula had not pulled off the primary election and that due to a tie in votes, there would be a run-off. People were ecstatic at the prospect of having a true politician leading our promising country for the

next four years. Yet, Lula regained his lost ground and won with 61% of the popular vote, to the disappointment of many.

Why do I write on this for the Bard Observer? How many people out here care about the politics of another country, however big and economically important as it may be to the U.S.? Not many. I won't put on a holier-than-thou attitude, because I don't pay attention to the election results of many other countries, yet I was unpleasantly surprised that the New York Times only featured one half-hearted article about the election results. So I decided to represent my glorious patria in this paper. Brazil may have an idiot savant running it, again, but I still love it and feel it deserves some recognition! ➡



OVERHEARD AT BARD

Our staff at The Observer wants to showcase the brilliant intellectual banter of Bard students heard around campus. We've been eavesdropping like mad. Here's what's been overheard this week:

• • • • •

High Times at Kline...

--"Wait... is pot a vegetable?"

--"I eat more pussy than cervical cancer!"

...And in the Classroom:

Professor: "Tbn Tufayl gets Hayy Ibn Yaqzan to discover a higher power by..."
Student: Wait... did she just say "Tbn Tufayl gets high?"

Strange Things Happen Behind Dorm Room Doors:

Girl #1 (walks into dorm room): "Hi!"

Girl #2 (sitting on her bed): "Hey. Can you hand me my fangs?"

So Apparently We're Not the only Angry Ones:

B&G Employee #1: I'd use a rope.
B&G Employee #2: Oh, really?
B&G Employee #1: Oh, yeah man, you give me a rope when I was a kid... I'd just use a rope to hang myself."

Some Classic One-Liners:

--"I don't know... I mean, Jesus just doesn't really do it for me."

--"Yeah... it's like taking candy from a quadriplegic baby."

• • • • •

Overheard something? Send it to us at:
observer@bard.edu

Administration Maintains Class Sizes Despite Rapid Expansion of Student Body

by Hannah Sheehan

INCOMING class size is up. And that, combined with the general feeling of unease produced by the way in which those vested, plastic-topped, burly construction dudes hover in subtly malicious fashion around the student population's favorite cottages, learning hovels, and one room school houses, is **freaking people out.** But Dean of the College, Michele Dominy, has a message. And that message is freak out not. At Bard, small class size is a matter of pride. Learning in an intimate setting where participation is welcomed, if not required, is part of all that makes Bard sexy to prospective students. And while the average size of an academic class is on the rise, each yearly increase is typically so small that it's only noticeable from right of the decimal point. In 2004, the average class size was 14.5 students. Last year the figure jumped to 14.8, and this year, it's up to 15, which, according to Dominy, is where the administration would like to see it stay put.

Moreover, class size is a programmatic decision, not a number handed down by the administration. This enables department heads to tailor the format of their classes to suit their subject matter. For instance, the number of students permitted to enroll in introductory film classes was recently reduced from between 40 and 45 to 25 at the behest of the department. Alternatively, many art history classes that once adhered to the maximum of 22 students rule, now accommodate up 35 students because of their non-seminar-dependant design. True, the overall number of students attending the college is increasing, but so is the number of faculty members. Over the past five years, Bard has hired 50 new tenured track employees, bringing the total up to 230 heads or 172 full time equivalent faculty members. Thus, the student teacher ratio is kept in check at a steady somewhere between 9:1 and 10:1, and we get to keep the Bard we love. ➡

All letters and submissions should be sent to to

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the Observer

Contributors: Laura Bomyea, Kirianna Buteau, Frank Brancely, Kaye Cain, Fiona Cook, Tyler Dorson, Grace Dwyer, ~~Neesha Fakir~~, **SARA FRIER**, **Josh Klein-Kuhn**, Carl Kranz, Len Gutkin, ~~Camila Geld~~, **Katy Kelleher**, **Sarah Leon**, **Simone Krug**, Genevieve Lynch, **JASON MASTBAUM**, James Molloy, Matt O'Koren, **Ethan Porter**, **Kevin Powell**, Noah Weston, ~~Andrew Worthington~~

Editor-in-Chief: **Michael Brown A.E.**; Ted Quinlan **Commentary:** ~~Michael Newton~~
News: **Hannah Sheehan**, Grace Dwyer **Music:** Elvia Pyburn Wilk
Associate Editors: Kaye Cain, *Frank Brancely* **Comics Page:** Mekko Harjo
International Correspondent: **Jesse Myerson**

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V FOR VOTE

by Jesse Myerson

On November 5th, here in Britain, children set fires. In this age of inclusion and secularism, the British still celebrate the foiling of a 1607 plot by the dreadful Catholics to set fire to Parliament, by way of gunpowder. The 5th is known as Guy Fawkes Day, after the chief deviser of the failed terrorist attack, the man whose effigy is, so many centuries after the event, still gleefully set ablaze by children. Still, one man's terrorist is another's freedom fighter, and some today, as did then, view Fawkes not as a lunatic, hell-bent on destruction, but instead as a radical activist, struggling against state-enforced religious supremacy through an act of revolution.

I don't wish to portray Fawkes and other insurgent religious zealots as preferable to those religious zealots already in power. Rather, the important for me lies in the fact that the desire to abolish one's government and establish a new one as a response to government-endorsed religious fundamentalism is ripe in the United States today—in a way you wouldn't expect.

David Kuo, formerly second-in-command at President Bush's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, in his recent, controversial book "Tempting the Faith: An Inside Story of Political Seduction" confirms what many have suspected for a long time: that the GOP under Karl Rove have been manipulating faith organizations for their strength in political efficacy. The book argues that the current occupants of 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. are no religious zealots at all, but rather exploit such people as the foot soldiers in their GOTV operations.

The Bush Administration and its philosophical backers are nevertheless firmly committed to adhering to their ideology: the religious pursuit of corporate profit. While feeding voters such high-profile fodder as stem cells, gay marriage and abortion, the Bush Administration has maneuvered through congress bill after bill ensuring billions of dollars in subsidies and tax cuts—as well as destroying massive numbers of regulations designed to protect people (also the four-legged and green-leaved kind) from corporate practices.

The Bush Administration's real achievements are in these fields: making bankruptcy claims nearly impossible for those who need them, making medical-malpractice suits more difficult to file, allowing big pharmaceutical companies to craft a Prescription Drug bill, opening up century-old environmental protections so that corporations can pollute, drill and deforest to their hearts' (or whatever they've got in a heart's stead) content, disregarding the safety of soldiers in order to keep a war going long enough to bestow upon Halliburton, Bechtel and the other reconstruction agencies billions of dollars worth of no-bid contracts, funneling yet untold amounts of money into Lockheed Martin and other defense contractors for weapons, passing tax cuts for the wealthiest in our country while poverty increases, joblessness remains abysmal, health insurance is cut and gas prices rise, rise, rise. With faithful like these, who needs nihilists?

Bush's post-neoconservatives—what an awful linguistic era, to necessitate such a denotation—breaking from the neoconservatives of yore, with their quaint little support for a welfare state, but retaining their lust for global American hegemony, are so committed to this marriage of corporate and state power, that they have implemented a radical redefinition (read: wholesale rejection) of evidence, reason and science, making this reverence of the dollar look a bit like prayer, this greed looks a bit like worship. All this means is that despite Kuo's charge, the leadership in this country remains religious fanatics of a type dramatically different from, but eerily similar to, the victims-hopeful of Fawkes' gunpowder plot.

I wish, at the risk of sounding too petit-bourgeois for my Marxist britches, to advocate a more modern, less sizzling method of setting fire to Parliament today: through voting. Before

the more radical among these pages' readership complete their eye-rolls, allow me to explain. A violent revolution of the kind Fawkes had in mind is not only unfeasible (they've got more guns); in a strange and delightful way, it is also unnecessary. Under a government so fundamentally, philosophically opposed to dissent and pluralism, voting practically is an aggressive act of revolution.

By the time these words are published, America will have voted and, it is my hope, as it should be yours, that the Democrats will have taken control at least of the House. Now, as any SAC member will tell you, the Democrats are not an alternative to politicians looking out for corporate interests; this country's two-party system is a centrist Capitalist group versus an extreme right-wing Capitalist group. Nevertheless, the Democrats provide an extremely hopeful option, insofar as the people leading them in the House are indeed quite progressive.

Consider that Rep. John Conyers (D-MI)—one of the leaders in the charge to impeach Nixon, an old-guard of the civil rights movement, the main congressional investigator of Ohio's voting problems in 2004 and the Downing Street memo

The stakes are tremendously high today, which is why corporatism must not only be defeated from controlling the majority of the American House of Representatives, but must be vanquished entirely from the halls of power here and everywhere on earth, if we are to survive another century.

before it, would be the head of the Judiciary Committee. Rep. Charlie Rangel (D-NY), who has been willing to put his body at risk, getting arrested time and time again for various causes (ending apartheid, ending the genocide in Sudan, the murder of Amedou Diallo, &c.) would be head of the Ways and Means Committee. Rep. Henry Waxman (D-CA), whose bulldog-like tenacity for combating GOP and corporate corruption, prompted The Nation to call him "The Democrats' Elliot Ness," would be head of the Government Reform Committee.

Consider that Rep. John Dingell (D-MI), the longest-serving member of the House, pledged that, as head of the

Debating Islam and Homosexuality

By Neesha Fakir

Iam writing this in response to numerous petitions circulating regarding Islam and homosexuality. Recently, throughout the Muslim world, orthodox Muslims have been overreacting, regarding the depiction of gay Muslims in the new documentary, *In the Name of Allah*. Previewed in LA this week, the film, directed by Sandi Simcha Du Bowski (*Trembling before God*) and Pervez Sharma, elucidates the controversies pervading Islam and homosexuality. Shot in 66 countries, including South Africa, Saudi Arabia, the Philippines and Iran, In the Name of Allah tells the stories of many suppressed gay and lesbian religious and secular Muslims.

One thing that the film makes abundantly clear is that the stories of many of the valorous and inspiring individuals in the film will definitely influence G-d in the most profound way possible. Having worked briefly on this movie with Pervez and Sandi, I got to know many of the Muslims involved. Knowing the importance of its release, I find it both disturbing and frustrating to think that people could tarnish such a noble film when it could instead be used to broaden their understanding of what a "gay Muslim" means to gay Muslims. The movie is an opportunity to impart an emotional experience that is otherwise unfamiliar to the many who fear having a close friendship with a gay Muslim.

The petitions that have been circulating around the Muslim world state that the film delineates the notion that the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, was homosexual. Certainly the film does not depict this, as it is an inaccuracy, but what many scholars of Islam and sexuality have found, is that homoeroticism was experienced by many during the 7th century inception of Islam. *In the Name of Allah*, merely puts a

Commerce Committee, he will investigate, "Privacy. Social Security number protection. Outsourcing protection. Unfair trade practices. Currency manipulation. Air quality. We'll look at the implementation of the Energy Policy Act of 2005. We'll take a look at climate change. We'll take a look at the nuclear waste program, where literally billions of dollars are being dissipated. We'll look at port security and nuclear smuggling, where there's literally nothing being done. On health, we'll take a look at Medicaid. The Food and Drug Administration. Generic drug approval. Medical safety. We'll also take a look at food supplements, where people are being killed. We will look at the overall question of Katrina recovery efforts."

On November 5th, here in Britain, children set fires. On November 7th, it is up to America to set one as well. Hopefully, by the time you read this, the aforementioned congressmen will already have set their staffs busily to work in order that they might waste no time in handing out subpoenas once Congress 110 commences. So this editorial is not a plea for you to vote, or even to vote Democrat. I hope instead that my plea is a bit larger in scope than just that.

The fanatics we face are like those Guy Fawkes wished to bomb, but with more access to weaponry, wealth, and information than had ever been imagined in 1607, more probably than is ever yet imagined by most. I read a BBC report the other day claiming that "There will be virtually nothing left to fish from the seas by the middle of the century if current trends continue." The stakes are tremendously high today, which is why corporatism must not only be defeated from controlling the majority of the American House of Representatives, but must be vanquished entirely from the halls of power here and everywhere on earth, if we are to survive another century.

I use the term "corporatism" intentionally in order to evoke the words of Giovanni Gentile, whom Mussolini called "the architect of fascism:" "Fascism should more properly be called corporatism, since it is the merger of state and corporate power." This is post-nuclear fascism, but more clandestine, less romantic, and, more importantly, able to be checked by voting.

I charge that voting corporatism out of power on November 7 will be a harbinger of a worldwide shift towards a more progressive politics of peace, justice, equality and care. Here in England, there will be fireworks today and people will sing a popular children's song: "Remember, remember the 5th of November." They will delight in the prevention of a blast on Parliament. I believe that, long down the line, when people remember how close we came to the world ending, people will celebrate our blast on Parliament, perhaps substituting "7th" for "5th." 🗳

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Thoughtlessness: A Response to “Turning In Her Grave”

by James Molloy

IN the last issue of the Bard Observer student journalist Frank Brancely wrote an angry article about the keynote address at the Hannah Arendt conference by controversial pro-Iraq War author and political thinker Christopher Hitchens. Entitled “Hannah Arendt: Turning in Her Grave,” Brancely’s article was derogatory, poorly written, factually incorrect, and generally misleading. If you have not read it, please do. It is an example of exactly the sort of thoughtlessness that Hannah Arendt was fighting against. Let’s start from the beginning.

This is the first line of the article: “Some people need to be dead.” Yes, this is what Hitchens said – about Uday and Qusay, the sons of Saddam Hussein, and in response to an audience member interrupting him. But Brancely yanks it out of context in order to portray Hitchens as a nut, and to stir up emotion. He does it again with Hitchens responding, “you might as well have asked me a question about global warming,” and then, “I think the idea of being a chosen people is a perfectly ridiculous one,” and finally, “I don’t know [what happened to the WMD’s]. But the lists existed!” Not a single direct quote is explained. Each of them portrays Hitchens as radically as possible, failing to reflect the substance of the lecture or the questions asked.

Brancely claims that Hitchens vainly lectured “on his own controversial views,” failing to address the subject he was invited to speak about, that is, anti-Semitism and Hannah Arendt. Hitchens did use Arendt as a sort of starting point, but Brancely would never have extended the same criticism to Israeli intellectual Yeron Ehrazi, who discussed Arendt in terms of Israel’s ongoing conflicts with Palestine and Lebanon – “controversial,” without a doubt.

Brancely also stated that, “Mr. Hitchens disagreed with Arendt’s views on totalitarianism.” This is wrong. Hitchens disagreed with Arendt’s views on the origins of anti-Semitism, not totalitarianism, arguing that, in fact, anti-Semitism cannot be understood rationally in the ways Arendt believed it could.

But the article’s single foulest moment is this: Brancely quotes Hitchens as saying, “Paul Wolfowitz [is] to President Bush as Fagin [is] to Oliver Twist” (both Wolfowitz and Fagin being Jews), as if this bigoted analogy were Hitchens’. In fact, it was an example Hitchens gave as evidence of contemporary anti-Semitism, not his own view. The quote was from conservative televangelist Pat Robertson, but Brancely reverses the meaning, portraying Hitchens as the anti-Semite.

Finally, in all his clumsy fury, Brancely actually turns on the moderator of the lecture, Bard professor William Mullen – not “MulleR,” as Brancely spells it. “Classics Professor William Muller...shamelessly promoted his new book and high privilege of being buried in the same cemetery (since apparently he somehow acquired tenure) as Hannah Arendt. Professor Muller then clumsily (it’s difficult to believe he teaches a

course on rhetoric) introduced himself as a great admirer of Mr. Hitchens, flattering him for minutes on end.” And finally, “Mr. Mullen was “too obsessed with Mr. Hitchens... to curtail the lecture to anything meaningful or of substance,” during a rowdy Q&A. First of all, Mullen’s book was published in 1985. Second, he was not shamelessly promoting it. Third, this is outburst is completely out of line. It is upsetting, not because it puts Professor Mullen in any sort of danger – in fact Mullen was rather unperturbed by the article, it should be noted – but because of its immaturity. Is Brancely seriously suggesting that Mullen should have said, “Excuse me Hitchens, but could you make your answers more meaningful, more substantive?” Or that, as a college, we should not treat our guests with respect? This is insulting and ridiculous.

I asked Professor Mullen what he thought about the article. He said “It’s called preaching to the converted, preaching to the choir. It’s very common. And, you know, if he’d taken my rhetoric and public speaking class in the first five minutes it’s one of the first three things I say please don’t do in this class: preach to the converted. So those who want to hate Christopher Hitchens for his position on Iraq will not need any persuading in this article, and those who are not already converted will see his lack of respect for the facts, and for Bard professors, and, above all, for a guest, under hostile conditions.”

Brancely was clearly upset by Mr. Hitchens’ continued support of the war in Iraq, but his trivializing response to Hitchens is symptomatic of a dangerous close-mindedness. Brancely chose to smear his adversary, not engage him; “preach,” as Mullen said, to those who already agree with him. And by being misleading, Brancely has succeeded only in muddying an enormously important debate.

“It is both perplexing and amusing,” Brancely writes, “that a man so clearly knowledgeable and astute could change his political orientation from that of pre-9/11 Trotskyism to post-9/11 neo-conservatism. Hitchens is certainly not an unintelligent man.” Yes, and that should answer Brancely’s own fuming question from a few lines before, “Who invited this man?” That Christopher Hitchens once called himself a liberal, opposed the first Gulf War, and wrote for The Nation – and is now pro-war – is extremely interesting. The toppling of dictator Saddam Hussein’s regime was, for Hitchens, the action consistent with his liberal values. Especially if we disagree with the war in Iraq, especially if we call ourselves liberals, we cannot afford to trivialize Christopher Hitchens. You cannot disagree with something that you do not understand. And if we are right about Iraq, we should not need distortions and emotional propaganda. We should be able to articulate ourselves. The disaster in Iraq and the Middle East – the hundreds of thousands dead – should be more than enough drive our arguments. Brancely’s liberal pep-rally does us a disservice.

“While I wish I could have written an article of some interest to you,” Brancely concludes, “perhaps informing you of something stimulating that you may have missed, I regret to report that this was not the case.” This makes sense. Because the real story was not Christopher Hitchens, it was our response to him. It was how we blocked out what he said, and resented him for challenging us. Thoughtlessness, ignorance – these are the sources of the evil Hannah Arendt was fighting against. And she is not “turning in her grave,” as Brancely has written, because of Hitchens, she is turning in her grave because of us.



A Response From the Author by Frank Brancely

IN the last issue of the Observer, I wrote an article criticizing the lecture given by keynote speaker Christopher Hitchens at the Hannah Arendt Conference. It’s not always the easiest task to remain objective when responding to a lecture by Hitchens, a consensus that I think most of his critics would agree with. The difficulty with my last article was that I attempted to address two major problems with his lecture: One, that he didn’t connect as well as he should have to the subject of the conference, Hannah Arendt; Two, that his combative style was too provocative to provide the audience with any insight into Arendt’s legacy. Both points seem strikingly similar, and in some ways they are, but it was a mistake on my behalf to confront them at the same time. I should have only raised the most substantive objection - his discourse on such particular issues as that of WMDs in Iraq, too tangential from Arendt to make for a satisfying lecture. Instead I mistakenly devoted substantial detail to what I felt was an unnecessary and hostile approach on his part.

The article should have been placed in the Op-Ed

section, but most importantly, I regret the disrespectful tone taken in regards to Professor Mullen, whose name I accidentally muddled as Muller. Professor Mullen is a well-respected member of our academic community. It was certainly never my intent for the article to be construed as insult.

Specifically, and this is in response to James Molloy’s criticism, I’d like to apologize for not making clear my criticism of the Fagan-Bush analogy; it was poorly conveyed. I’d like also to concede that Molloy is correct in his observation that Hitchens stance on Arendt’s views on the origins of totalitarianism is in fact separate from his views on anti-Semitism (albeit, there is certainly a relation); of course, my point was that there was a disappointingly marginal focus on Arendt (at her own conference).

It is my hope that the tone of the article does not overshadow my conclusions about the lecture. If any reader would like to have a conversation about my take on the conference, I’d be more than willing to do so.

Bard Problems

by Josh Klein Kuhn

“Brudvig said the effect of student and parent support on his decision in the form of petitions and protests was minimal. The resolution of this is between the administration and the union. Tactically does [student support] change my mind? No.”

-The Bard Observer, October 30, 2006. “B&G and Ludlow at a Standstill Over Salary Agreements”

JIM BRUDVIG’S ASSERTION THAT THE OPINIONS OF STUDENTS AND PARENTS DO NOT MATTER TO HIM IS QUITE POSSIBLY THE MOST APPALLING MESSAGE I’VE EVER HEARD FROM AN ADMINISTRATOR AT BARD (AND I’VE HEARD QUITE A FEW SHOCKING ONES). THAT STATEMENT, QUOTED IN THE BARD OBSERVER, IS THE MOST DAMNING EVIDENCE I’VE SEEN OF THE MISERABLE STATE OF THIS SCHOOL.

As Bard announces the kickoff of its \$350 million capital campaign, President Bottstein attributes the lack of alumni donations to the fact that don’t often enter lucrative fields. There’s merit to this assessment, but I’d say it goes deeper than that. Alumni don’t give to Bard because they leave here bitter and resentful. Their needs and wants have been, and are, continuously marginalized and shunted aside by an administration focused on the College’s image, reputation, and endowment. Almost any complaint voiced by students about their experience at Bard can be traced to an administrative decision. The claim “Man, there was nothing fun happening on Friday night,” for instance, can be traced to a lack of meaningful student space and the introduction of an overbearing Party Patrol.

For further validation of my point just take a look at a small number of the groups that have publicly vocalized their marginalization at the hands of the Bard administration in recent memory. A year ago, the entire BRAVE staff resigned in protest against the administration’s attitudes towards those in our community affected by sexual violence. The rugby team, which is the most popular sport at Bard, both in participation and fan base, played their “home” games at Vassar this year because of a lack of support from the College. And after three years of leading students on about a replacement for the Old Gym, offering token gifts like the SMOG, the administration has not taken action, even when the students put up the money, towards construction of a new building. Anyone vainly looking for a fun Friday night knows who’s to blame.

I ate supper with a first-year and her parents over Parent’s Weekend, and was only a bit surprised when her mother started to express the disillusionment with Bard that she had acquired since her daughter arrived here in August. The other night, I heard another first-year talking about how unresponsive the administration was, and about how the student body needed to radicalize and up the ante in our collective dealings with the College. When people who have been here for only three months say stuff like that, something is wrong!

Brudvig says that students and their parents pay the money they do in order to get the top faculty we can. That’s not quite right. We pay these huge sums in order to get the best education we can. This education is not comprised only of what’s written on the chalkboards or taught to us by our professors. In its totality, education also encompasses what we learn from spending time with friends, with lovers, with enemies. It’s the cumulative effect of living in a place, with other people, for a substantial chunk of time. The majority of my time at Bard has not been spent in the classroom, and to think that that’s all I care about is crazy. How can I be expected to learn in the classroom when my living space is poorly maintained and unclear because of budget choices by the college? How can I be expected to unwind and take a breather from my demanding class schedule when the social life of this campus is miserable? How can I be expected to learn how to make myself a contributing member of a community when those “in charge” clearly don’t value my presence or my input?

The implications of Brudvig’s quote for this community should frighten and outrage any student or parent who reads it. This quote, and his attitude surrounding the campus-supported living wage campaign are emblematic of a broader, systemic problem at Bard. The administrators of this College were hired to administer the affairs of this college in the best interest of the students, and they are failing.

The Day After: Elections and Consequences

by Ethan Porter

AFTER six years away from the White House, and twelve years out of power in Congress, the Democrats are back. What the party still lacks in power, it can now make up for in prime time television. Because, believe me, for the first time in a long time, Democrats will actually be on television. The president can remain steadfast in his refusal, despite the best attempts of the opposition party and of his own father, to move our troops out of Iraq—and the troops, as a result, will stay there. But at least Nancy Pelosi will be featured nightly on the evening news.

There surely are limits to what the new Democratic Congress will be able to accomplish. Iraq may be one of those limits, and the most deleterious tax cuts of this decade may be another. Yet all is not lost. Most intriguingly, one of the many powers afforded to the Congressional majority is that of the subpoena. If the Democrats put this power to effective use, the Bush Administration may be forced with its most daunting prospects to date: oversight.

Already, the loyal voters and activists who powered the party to victory are clamoring for impeachment. Indeed, by the standards established by the Republicans in regards to our last president, George W. Bush makes a decent candidate for impeachment. The incoming Democratic Chair of the Judiciary Committee, Congressman John Conyers of Michigan, has long publicly flirted with the idea of impeaching Bush. Earlier this year, The Nation ran a cover article calling for impeachment. In the short term, however, a massive series of overlapping investigations are more likely. War profiteering? Abu Ghraib?

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Enron-White House connections? Hurricane Katrina? All will be on the table. And if you listen to some Congressman, all already are.

When someone does something wrong, there should be consequences. The same should hold true for the people who've recently been in power. Legal theorist Jeffrey Toobin has floated the idea of holding various Administration officials, specifically Attorney General Alberto Gonzalez, in contempt of Congress. Such a scenario is probably more likely than one might think. The Bush Administration, during the apotheosis of its power, argued that its actions in relation to the "War on Terror" were not deserving of Congressional oversight, because of some antediluvian idea called the "unitary executive theory." This theory articulates, mostly in meaningless legal mumbo jumbo, that the president's actions are beyond question and legal recourse. If Congress presses for information, the White House might resist on the basis of this theory. What was a politically useful argument when Republicans were in control will be moot now—unless the White House stubbornly clings to it, until its own members are being brought in prison garb to

testify. Again, not an entirely unlikely scenario.

The Democrats' ability to investigate the Administration in an orderly and productive fashion will only be possible, however, if the party stays together. But this unity is already starting to fray. Case in point: the unappetizing and seemingly unending spat between the liberal blogs and the Democratic establishment. One would think that a victory would unite these factions, which essentially have the same goals—but if Kennedy's famous adage that success has a thousand fathers is true, then the blogs and the likes of Rahm Emmanuel are locked in a nasty custody battle. The day after the election, Atrois (the pseudonym for Duncan Black, a Philadelphia-area economist and one of the most popular liberal bloggers) labeled Emmanuel, the leader of the Democratic effort to take back the House, the "wanker of the day." When Emmanuel immodestly took credit for the victory in his hometown Chicago Tribune newspaper, the blogs piled on, indirectly arguing that they somehow owned Tuesday, November 7th. And in D.C., Democrats are waging a passionate internecine battle over the number two spot in the House.

The Democrats' ability to investigate the Administration in an orderly and productive fashion will only be possible, however, if the party stays together

The conservative media immediately began to declare that last Tuesday's victory was "good news" for the Right, since, according to this narrative, so many of the winning candidates ran as conservative Democrats. But the opposite is true: nearly all Democratic winners, including our own Kirstin Gillibrand, ran as staunch anti-Iraq war populists, committed to bringing the troops home and substantially changing the free trade pacts of the 1990's. Granted, some candidates, including Tennessee's highly visible Harold Ford, ran so far to the right that the term "Democrat" ceased to have any ideological meaning. But candidates like Ford were the exception, not the rule. And Ford lost. The House Progressive Caucus will see a substantial increase in members when the next session begins. And there are the other positive consequences for liberals, perhaps unseen by many on Election Day: rising to the ranks of Committee Chairs will be some of the most liberal and outspoken members of Congress. John Conyers, Barney Frank and Henry Waxman will never be mistaken for "moderates" or "social conservatives," or whatever new term the Joe Kleins of the world invent in order to convince the country that, no matter the election results, "the center" is always where American politics must lie.

Last week's results should be construed as a sharp rejoinder to the policies of George W. Bush. Donald Rumsfeld's resignation the day after indicates that the White House understands this. The same might eventually be said of the Democratic Party, if it agrees to investigate misdeeds and advance populist-liberal ideology, while mostly avoiding the catastrophe of petty internal politics. ➡

such tendencies toward internal difference, it makes sense that the Democrats would open Congress up to meaningful dialogue and investigation in ways that the standing Republican regime would never dream of. And although it frustrates the hell out of me that this requires any sort of credit to the discursive integrity of a party that used every dirty procedural trick in the book to kill debate, it still must be done. Americans need to remember what it is to have more than just one voice in government. While in the minority, Democrats have only been able to faintly achieve this end, but you can be damned sure that the GOP will make its voice heard stridently.

So what's the point of me belaboring the need for bringing everybody to the table on these issues rather than just having the Democrats use their majorities in the Senate and House to push their agenda in a Republican manner? In the long view, it behooves the whole country for the majority party to be inclusive, so as to ensure that each succeeding Congress strives for policy borne of the broadest public interest. We might be cool with the Democrats shoving through laws and programs that liberals love without any regard for the folks across the aisle, but that reinforces the tone the GOP set in their tenure, just with a nobler political end. If we want to retain a voice if and when the Republican Party regains its footing, then it's better to keep fresh in the Congress' institutional memory some sense of bipartisan accord so as to ensure a place at the table for the Democrats. Is this selling out? No, it's just acknowledging that there's more policy middle ground than folks like me are often willing to realize.

From a practical standpoint, even though the Democrats will firmly control the House that does not permit

Sex Column

Over-The-Counter Plan B: Coming to a Pharmacy Near You? Not Quite Yet...

On August 24, 2006, the FDA approved the sale of Plan B over-the-counter. The FDA finalized their decision three years after an advisory committee introduced their initial recommendation to sell the oral contraceptive over-the-counter. The FDA was hesitant to authorize the over-the-counter sale of Plan-B because of inadequate data regarding usage among younger women and the fear of misuse without the supervision of a licensed medical practitioner. Subsequent to the FDA's decision, nine states passed laws legalizing the over-the-counter availability of Plan B. Plan B is available for women eighteen years and older without a prescription from retail pharmacies in Alaska, California, Hawaii, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Vermont and Washington.

At Bard, Plan B is available from Health Services for \$10. Upon patient request, Health Services can write a prescription for Plan B, allowing the patient to fill the prescription at a later date. CVS in Red Hook and Rhinebeck fill Plan B prescriptions for \$40 without insurance. When asked if Plan B is available over-the-counter at CVS, the pharmacist replied that it would be several more months before the emergency contraceptive was sold there without a prescription. Duramed, the pharmaceutical company responsible for Plan B distribution, needs to change the packaging before the drug will be available over-the-counter. Plan B is also available at Planned Parenthood of Red Hook or Kingston for an average of \$43 (prices are based on personal insurance). Planned Parenthood encourages appointments, but walk-ins are also welcome, and no prescription is needed. Although it was rumored that Wal-Mart in Kingston carries over-the-counter Plan B, they in fact do not.

For more information about Plan B call Health Services, ext. 7433, or go to <http://www.go2planb.com>.


Have you ever wondered if people are actually attracted to the people they sleep with? Are you curious about the various methods people use to maintain their pubic hair? Is there a sex toy culture at Bard? Do people really bump uglies as much as you think? The Sex Column needs your help! We are interested in documenting the sexual life at Bard, and we need all of you to represent your sexuality, whether you are sexually active or not. The survey is completely confidential and anonymous. Our aim is to collect 500 surveys and so far we have 200. We welcome all sexual beliefs, preferences, and desires! Look out for Genevieve and Fiona tabling in the Campus Center and Kline. The results will be published in an upcoming issue. Thanks to all those who have already participated!

a free-for-all. This is still Bush Country and as such, Democrats need to keep in mind that not only must their bills pass muster in Congress, but they must either be so widely appealing that they become veto-proof or somehow satisfy a likely hostile President's contrary political interests. Furthermore, the Senate dangles by the thinnest of margins, and all it takes is a Joe Lieberman to fuck up the party for everyone. We may not soon see the vibrant resurgence of legislative liberalism, at least not in implementation, given these constraints. Mind you, it'll still be a vast improvement over the last decade's conservative bender.

And yet, were the level of gumption among Democrats to suddenly soar beyond all previously documented gumption ratios, I'd ask of them the following: Kill the tax breaks, preserve the Bill of Rights, get the troops out, and investigate this administration into the ground. Some of these demands might seem idealistic, but hell, after the GOP witnessed its ranks take serious hits over their very association with the President, its members in Congress might be slightly more inclined to take the Democrats up on an offer or two. As willing as I'd be to dump sewage into the Republican caucus' living rooms, even I know when it's time to shake hands and find solutions. But seriously, impeachment on my birthday, guys. ➡

Lydia Davis Returns to Bard

by Len Gutkin



ON November 13, fiction writer and translator Lydia Davis visited Bard College as part of Bradford Morrow's class on contemporary fiction. Davis has written several collections of short stories, including *Break it Down* and *Samuel Johnson is Indignant*, and a novel, *The End of the Story*. She has translated Proust, Blanchot, and Leiris, among others.

Earlier in the semester, Professor Morrow brought William H. Gass; for November 27, he has invited Valerie Martin.

Davis was kind enough to sit down with me after her reading and discuss her work.

Len Gutkin: So much of your work is funny, but never in a slapstick or exaggerated way. How do you approach the humor in your work? What would you say is its importance in your vision?

Lydia Davis: Well, in the beginning I didn't even know that the pieces were funny. What I did was enter the persona of a slightly obsessed or obsessive person, and then talk very seriously about one of the things that was bothering her or that she was thinking about. So I would play it very straight, and in the beginning I simply thought that these were her obsessions, and I didn't see them in a larger context. But I think that's one of the reasons I liked Beckett so much in the beginning, was that the humor and the pathos seemed to be completely joined, and you could start laughing and immediately go from that into crying. I find a lot of things funny. My humor is awake all day long. I suppose that it's an immediate instigator for writing something, just as it would be for telling somebody something funny. But when you tell something you only have a minute and you have to get it just right, and life goes on, but when you write it you can make sure you've got it.

LG: In many of your stories, words are explored as words: there is a preoccupation with etymology, for instance, or even with the dictionary itself, as in your story "The Old Dictionary." I assume that some of this is related to your work as a translator. How would you say your translation work has affected your fiction?

What sort of cross-fertilization is there?

LD: The interest in words and language really came long before the translating, because I grew up in a family in which language was examined all the time. Not just the written language but also when we were talking—although it was in no way a pedantic family because there was a very lively sense of humor too, but if you spoke in a clumsy way it would be noticed and pointed out to you—which can make you very self-conscious, and did, but it made you very good at speaking. And then the translating—I think they feed off each other, because the writing makes me more particular about each word, each sentence, and then having to think about each word in the other language and what it might be in the English makes me much more conscious of all the many choices there are in English. I really love English, I'm not a Francophile particularly. And then the Proust—that was the first project where I actually looked up French etymologies too, I'd never gone that far—just to understand the word better. Because the French word *has*, which means alas—it meant “Oh Misery” or something like that when you break down the two syllables. I just think etymologies are fascinating, because they always reveal something hidden inside the word.

LG: I'd like to quote from your story "Thyroid Diary," about a woman who is taking thyroid medication to help speed up her metabolism, which, presumably, should also increase the speed of her mental activity. You write, "I had thought at first, If my brain is working this well with inadequate amounts of thyroid hormone, how well my brain will work with the proper amounts of thyroid hormone! But then I began to distrust the thought, because what seemed like good working of the brain seemed good to that very same brain that was lacking the proper dose of hormone, and that brain could be quite mistaken." To me, this paragraph seems in some ways paradigmatic of much of your work: the kind of minute dissection of consciousness that is conscious of itself. This sort of problem is basically philosophical, and indeed your work has frequently been called philosophical. How do you experience the intersection between your kind of fiction of self-consciousness and more formal exercises in philosophy?

LD: That's a hard question, because I feel I'm not a really disciplined reader of philosophy. There have been times when I read philosophy in a more dedicated way. I read a lot of Bergson when I was pretty young. And then I would sort of try a page

of Hegel, and I thought even trying a page did amazing things to my brain. But the problem is I get almost too stimulated by some of these thinkers, and every other sentence there's a new idea that I can hardly assimilate, and I guess now I read more towards my own writing, so I get too stimulated and want to go off and do something with it when I'm reading. I guess what interests me is the idea of absorbing something very difficult and abstract, and absorbing it to a level that you don't even really know that you've absorbed it, and then writing something that may appear very simple on the surface but is actually formed by this more complex thinking.

LG: Many of your short stories are only a few lines long, some even a single line. Even in your relatively long works a kind of minimalism prevails. How would you describe this pared down approach? What possibilities does it open up for you that more traditionally “fleshed out” fictional approaches don’t?

LD: Well, for one thing I do also write long and longer and very long. I mention that because I like having the option. I think I wouldn't be as happy with the very short pieces if that's all I wrote. I really like going from the very long, very extended ones to the paragraph or page and then down to the very shortest. I'm very aware of excess when I read other people's work or even my own: a sentence that just marks time or words that just sort of reflect glory back on the author instead of doing anything for the story. It was funny that even Proust, even though he writes at such length, in one of his letters objected to superfluity, and wrote in favor of concision. I think it has to do with something that came up when I was talking to the students before. One of them said that when she stopped reading one of the very short things, she felt that it was an invitation to go on thinking, to go on herself, thinking and going further with it, and I like that idea very much.

LG: Who are some of your influences, past or present, or writers you much admire? I'm especially hoping you might name some writers whom Bard students may have never heard of.

LD: The one that often comes to mind is Lucia Berlin. She's a short story writer who I think comes close to Grace Paley. She's very good, she would be in the same company as Paley and Alice Munro, and that's the sort of thing she writes, family stories, but very well written, about the Southwest. I think she never got the attention she should have gotten. 🍷

HIGHLIGHTS FROM WRESTLE

By Sara Frier

Untitled (Para un Hombre in Uniforme)- Felix Gonzales-Torres,
1991
Red, white and blue lollipops, endless supply
Ideal weight: 220 lbs.

Untitled is one of many interactive, almost-but-not-quite ephemeral pieces by Gonzales-Torres. A large pile of red, white and blue, star-shaped, individually wrapped lollipops simply waits in the corner of gallery 9, diminishing as curious viewers apprehensively partake. The piece is so unusually interactive that a gallery assistant must stand by it and invite; indeed, many an elderly patron could be heard to grumble, "It's not really art." Conceptually, 220 lbs. is the average weight of an American GI with his backpack on. While, with that knowledge, the piece clearly speaks to issues of war, the media, and consumption, Untitled is far from self-explanatory, and part of the fun is to watch people experience the piece. Interestingly—perhaps thematically--- the lollies themselves are rather poor in taste and quite difficult to eat...


And If by Christopher Wool, 1992
Enamel on Aluminum

And if demands very little unpacking. Large, black capital letters are stenciled on a white, vertically rectangular background, broken up such that certain words start on one line and must finish on the next. Hard to read at first, the letters spell out "AND IF YOU DON'T LIKE IT YOU CAN GET THE FUCK OUT OF MY HOUSE." As part of an edgy show in a brand new space, the piece virtually dares the viewer to judge.

Untitled by Doris Salcedo, 2001
Wood and Concrete


Hauntingly beautiful, Salcedo's *Untitled* features two antique wooden armoires filled with smooth, slightly fractured concrete. One armoire is turned horizontally on its side, and virtually thrusts through the other, which stands vertically. While it is difficult to discern any legible theme, the piece is a work of stunning, seamless craftsmanship and attention to form. Everyday objects are reconceived into a complicated, abstract sculpture that demands circumambulation. The rich, reddish wood gleams against the dull concrete; new attention is paid to the presence of the furniture itself. You will return to it before leaving the gallery, but you won't know why.

Good Boy, Bad Boy by Bruce Nauman, 1985
Video and Sound installation for two monitors

Situated directly next to the lollipops, Nauman's obnoxiously loud video is remarkably engaging, if not downright disturbing. Two monitors feature Tucker Smallwood, an African-American man, and Joan Lancaster, a Caucasian woman, facing the viewer head-on and speaking like a newscaster. The sound is much, much higher on the middle-aged, proper-looking woman's monitor, and she recites text in a commanding, insistent voice: "I am an evil man. YOU are an evil man. WE are evil men. I don't want to die. YOU don't want to die. We don't want to die. THIS is the fear of death..." she touches on any and every topic within this template, and the pattern becomes a sort of hypnotizing mantra. Expectation of the next sentence exceeds the desire for a surprise; routine becomes the most thrilling part. The voice is audible from nearly all corners of its large gallery; when moving to another room, it is missed. 

ROMANTIC RAPTORS

Each issue the Sex Column will interview a Bard student who is sexy and single. This issue we got up close and personal with the extremely sexy and extremely eligible bachelor Carl.



What is your year?
2008

What is your pet peeve?
When all those freshmen get out of symposium on Mondays and they all congregate at Kline. I hate that.

Out of all the presidents, which would you boink?
I'd love to squeeze my way into the tub with Taft.

What is a secret addiction that you are ashamed of?
Asking people for money. (I'm getting paid for this, right?)

If you were a teletubby, which would you be?
Dipsy because he is the most contrarian of the four.

What is the color of love?

Puce. On the TV show *Diff'rent Strokes*, Arnold once asked Mr. Drummond what puce was. He replied, "Expensive purple."

If you were a playboy playmate, which month would you want?
February because it is Black History month.



Juvies Sheds Light on the Myth of American “Justice”

by Katy Kelleher



ON Wednesday, November 8th the Prison Activist Coalition hosted a screening of the documentary Juvies, a film created by director Leslie Neale with the help of kids from her video production class at the Los Angeles Central Juvenile Hall. Juvies is an introduction to a month of events relating to juvenile incarceration hosted by the Bard Prison Activist Coalition. Through interviews with twelve different kids, all under the age of 18, yet all being tried as adults, it becomes increasingly clear that there is something going terribly wrong in the American justice system. Not only are kids being prosecuted as adults, but new laws designed to discourage gang membership are sending huge numbers of kids that are not actually associated with gangs to juvenile hall, and eventually prison.

One of the things that makes Juvies especially disturbing is how charismatic and relatable many of the kids interviewed actually are. They are not hardened criminals; they are just less fortunate versions of us, kids who in many cases, were abused as children and eventually ended up in the wrong place at the wrong time. Duc, a sixteen-year-old high school student, was arrested for driving a car from which four shots were fired. Although no one was hurt, and there was absolutely no evidence that Duc was a gang member, he was still tried for attempted murder and received a sentence of 35 years to life. When recalling the years of abuse from his father, Duc cries quietly, mourning both his future and his past. It is hard to watch Duc and his transition from juvenile hall into prison. As the movie progresses, the sensitive sixteen-year-old turns into a surprisingly scary adult who is willing to do whatever necessary to survive in maximum security prison. Through the narration of Mark Walberg, we learn that Duc is a perfect example of how the criminal justice system has “shifted away from its original intent of keeping kids out of adult prison” and instead has begun to punish kids for what they might do, not what they have done.

Many kids end up serving years in prison for minor involvement in criminal acts because of trumped-up laws designed to prevent and punish gang activity. In the past few decades, there has been a proliferation of “enhancement laws,” laws that tack on extra time (years and even decades) to the original sentence when the crime is believed to be associated with gang membership or gun possession. This has been caused largely by public demand for harsher penalties and the widespread belief that juvenile crime is on the rise. Leslie Neale interviews people on the street, asking them questions about their perception of juvenile crime. Most people believe crime is increasing, when in fact, juvenile crime rates have dropped significantly in recent years. Another popular misconception is that juveniles are mentally comparable to adults and are just as able to make rational, meaningful decisions. However, Neale presents us with biological evidence that many adolescents have an inherent inability to

prevent impulsive behavior; the area of the brain dedicated to logical decision making, the prefrontal cortex, is not fully developed.

Is prison the answer for kids who commit crimes? All the evidence available points to no. Adolescents sent to adult prison have a much higher recidivism rate than adults. Prison introduces many kids to drugs, violent activity and homosexual behavior. The suicide rate for kids in adult prison is nearly eight times higher than that of adults in prison. The American Justice system no longer tries to rehabilitate and reform young offenders; instead, they are punished severely for crimes that they may have been only marginally involved in. It is also important to note that America is alone in this kind of treatment of juvenile offenders. The U.S. is one of only two nations that routinely sentences kids to Life Without Parole (LWOP), with the number exceeding 2,230. The only other country, Israel, has the much lower number of 7. These numbers are disturbing. Our juvenile crime rate is only slightly higher than that of Europe, so why are we placing so many of our kids behind bars for life?

Juvies raises many provocative questions about the conception of “justice” in America. Most academics agree that the focus of the American justice systems has shifted away from rehabilitation and onto keeping the “criminal class” separate from the rest of society. It is as though America has given up on a large portion of their citizens, and tragically, the youth of America is often included.

Thanks to George Felix Hamel III and Max Forman-Mullin for answering all of my questions about juvenile justice and contributing significantly to this article. 📧

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The UK Serves Up Rap Battles Correctly But the US Still Wins

BY NOAH WESTON

For battle mc’s, 8 Mile offered benefits and drawbacks. It shed light on and helped legitimate battling, leading to more financial support and sponsorship. Then again, that backing came from a lot of the same cultural entities (i.e. MTV) that helped in the dilution of mainstream rap music over the past ten years. Eminem’s portrayal of Rabbit also ennobled the battle rapper in a way that had never been done outside of the context of hip hop itself. On the other, racist side of the coin, it also created a sort of “white knight” complex, situating the Caucasian mc as a struggling underdog who can distinguish himself and elevate the standard of battling, if only those terribly uncouth black people would just understand where he was coming from. Given the state of race, power, and influence in all phases of American society, no sensible man or woman can look at that shit without saying, “This cracker’s fucking delusional.”

Thankfully, mc battling, in its most serious circles, has not succumbed to the pitfalls that other branches of rap have in pursuit of a bigger check. In fact, the shit’s gotten more sophisticated and more inventive than ever. For convincing proof, just watch footage from each year’s Scribble Jam, where one of the largest, most competitive rap battles in the country occurs every August. Back in 1997, when eventual champion Juice faced off against Eminem in the finals, Eminem hit Juice with lines like (who was far less mind-blowing than his biopic suggests) with lines like “You couldn’t sell two copies if you pressed a double album.” Nowadays, rhymes like those are practically standard. This year’s champion, California’s (WEST COAST, BITCHES) Thesaurus demonstrated just how far battling has come when he told his portly opponent, Deuce Leader, “You’re so fat that even when I’m not lookin’, I see John Goodman.” God damn.

Cats like Thesaurus freestyle as well as many mc’s write, which means that the standard has risen to the point where one begins to wonder how competitive can the field be? To answer this, Jumpoff.tv, a hip hop media venture out of the UK held its first “World Rap Championship,” a contest to find the best team of lyricists in a two-on-two tournament spanning two continents (or at least the parts of them that speak English). The first leg of the competition pitted six teams from each region against each other, with US mc’s from San Francisco, New York, Portland, Newark, and Chicago, and UK rappers hailing from London, Glasgow, Hogwarts, or wherever else they greet you with a “Pip-pip! Cheerio!” Each division went through a grueling schedule of more than a dozen matches in a single day, each team facing each other twice. Although there was a gap between the end of each tournament and when certain matches’ outcome were determined by internet vote, in absence of a clear verdict from the judges, the winners in both divisions were apparent before all the footage was even finished making its way to the internet.

The aforementioned Thesaurus and Portland’s iLLmacuLate, also a Scribble Jam champ at the precocious age of 17, took the US title and the right to face the UK’s Possessed and Whashisface of the Freestyle Masons, leaving people of each region to insist that their boys were going to “straight murder” their opponents. Odds were stacked against the UK pair, especially given that they were facing two Scribble champs who can claim credit for transforming the battle scene in the English-speaking rap world. In this contest of braggadocio, you could expect the US team to use their reputations as international phenomena, ones who garnered acclaim even in the UK, in order to make the opposition feel like they didn’t have a chance. Or to quote iLLmacuLate in the second battle, “Look, there’s an American shadow/shouldn’t you be standing in it?”

Judging by the first battle, it seemed as if Possessed and Whashisface walked into the lion’s den rocking only a raw meat loincloth ‘cause homeboys got straight slaughtered.

Continued on page 11

Film Review:
Babel

By Sarah Leon

THREE more disparate locales around which to weave a plot could hardly have been chosen more efficiently than in Alejandro Gonzalez Iñarritu’s latest film, Babel. The juxtaposition of settings, from the arid desert-mountains of rural Tazarine, Morocco, to the colorful and humid hustle and bustle of Mexico, to the techno-sleek, hipster-filled wonder-city of Tokyo, instantly strike the viewer and facilitate the film’s bona fide visual feast of cinematography. However, over-stimulation of all sorts permeates the film, and I left the theater having enjoyed the food, but feeling uncomfortably gorged on it.

Babel’s main premise is the potential of a single event to link vastly different people and to create emotional parallels within their lives, and Iñarritu, who has already distinguished himself as a director with films such as 21 Grams and Amores Perros, pulls together a cast as varied in fame as they are racial background, in order to illustrate this theme. Big-names Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchett star as American tourist couple Richard and Susan Jones, first-timer Mohamed Akzham plays a helpful Moroccan local, and Gael Garcia Bernal has a bit part as a live-wire deviant named Santiago. These characters, along with a great many others, converge and clash in situations that highlight the complexities of human interaction both within groups and across cultures.



The plot’s defining event occurs when a small Moroccan boy fires a gun under the taunting of his older brother and strikes Susan through a bus window. The tourist couple’s young children play peacefully at home in San Diego with their nanny, Amelia, who is forced to bring them to her son’s wedding in Mexico when the terrible event waylays the children’s parents. The Moroccan investigators exercise police brutality, as do members of the US-Mexican Border patrol. We later find out that the rifle was given to a Moroccan tour guide by a Japanese hunter as a gift of thanks. The Japanese man’s daughter, a deaf-mute girl named Chieko, is deeply scarred as a result of having witnessed her mother’s suicide and because of the inherent difficulties of grappling with adolescence as a deaf-mute. A lot going on, much?

As Susan lies bloodied on the cool mud floor of a Moroccan abode, gripping her husband’s hand in immense pain, a wrinkled native woman hums softly in the corner. She pulls out a long teal pipe, inhales deeply from one end and lights. Gingerly, she pulls it to the lips of the wounded woman and encourages her to puff. I mean, hey man, why can’t we all just get along? The few brief, tender moments like this one lend some emotional honesty to the characters and help alleviate the boiling vat of tension that the two-hour-plus action-fest creates.

It is clear that Iñarritu is making many political statements about international relations, but he has so much to say that individual messages get lost in the shuffle instead of unifying his themes. The gorgeous camera work alone is enough to redeem some of the plot train-wreckage. In fact, the panoramic shots of Casablanca and the bustling nightlife on a street corner in Tokyo are probably the only reasons why I’d recommend the film, because although I left Babel feeling stressed out, I would very much like to go on vacation. 📺

Weston , Continued from page 10

While they tried to get at Thesaurus for his acne scars, he retorted, using a reference Whashisface made regarding his “boots,” saying:“You tried to call these boots/nah, these are called cross-trainers/but for y’all fakers, I’ll just refer to ‘em as jawbreakers/yo, you’re quick to fail/and too much of a bitch to tell/all your acne jokes you thought were sick as hell apply to him as well (points to Possessed)/you look like Christian Bale/is frickin’ frail/has sickle cell/and survived a bombing of the British rail.”

Unsurprisingly, they took this and the last of three battles in Las Vegas to take the championship. Internet spectators got considerably heated over their loss to Possessed and Whashisface in the second match, after the match went to a series of overtime verses and punchlines that all appeared to serve Thesaurus and iLLmacuLate’s side better. This controversy aside, the most ambitious and internationally representative event in battle history came to a decisive close, with mc’s from two sides of the globe showing the world that no matter how much exposure or commodification battling experiences, someone will still do that shit right. As a note of personal pride, I’m glad that the ones do it come from my side of the country. West Side, suckas. To see every battle that took place in the World Rap Championships,head over to <http://www.jumpoff.tv> and click on “2on2 World Rap Championships” on the left frame

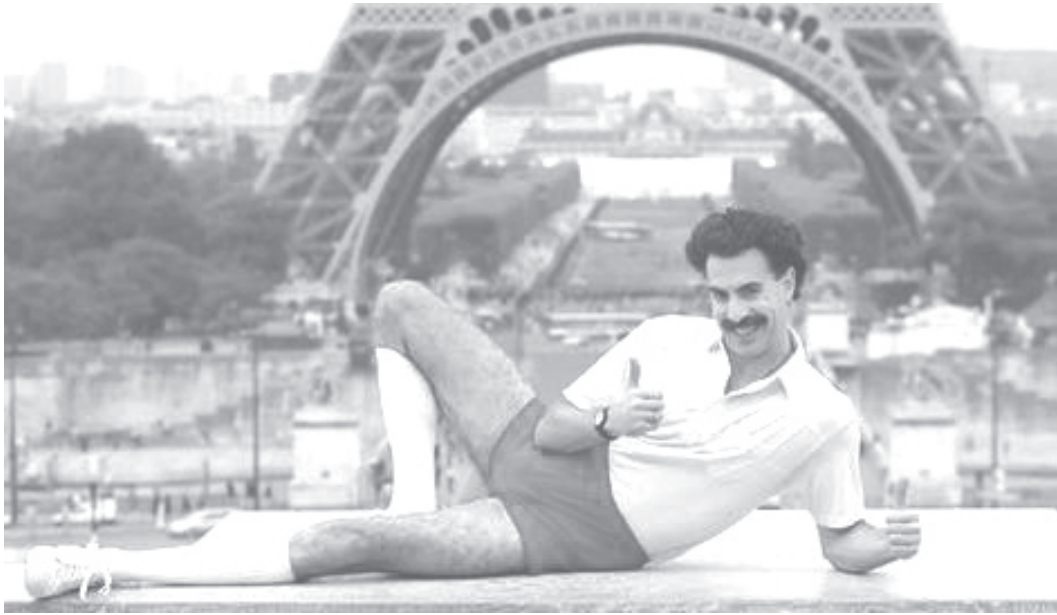


Borat: A Man So Stupid That His Film Is Smart

By Kirianna Buteau

I have to confess something, and I strongly suspect that I’m not alone amongst Bardians in having this issue— I tend to be a little bit of a snob about humor. My sense of humor is expansive and diverse but when a movie contains an abundance of scatological and crude sexual content without any intellectual value behind it, I tend to classify this as ‘dumb’ and set the film aside. Thus, having had almost no exposure to Sacha Baron Cohen’s controversial Kazakh journalist besides the preview for Borat!: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan, I decided it might be time to introduce myself, but with the suspicion that a great deal of the humor would be of this “dumb” variety. But if I keep talking like this, it’ll sound like I’m 60 and conducting an ethnography of what is ‘hip’ today. Let’s see if I can do better, as the main thing Borat does is awaken audience members to their own prejudices.

Borat Sagdiyev’s journey begins in his extremely but perhaps not so unrealistically poor village, where we meet his jealous wife. He then flies with his overweight producer



kept a secret initially. The road trip leads him to DC and then across the southern United States, where he has to deal with everything from a homosexual encounter to annoying drivers, a Jewish family, different varieties of redneck, frat boys, and Pentecostal worshippers.

Naturally, this entire time Borat reveals himself as an incorrigible bigot in most possible senses of the term, and this is where some audience members probably find themselves not so amused, especially at the abundance of harmless scatological and utterly outrageous sexual humor. Even if we understand that the amount of jokes made at the expense of Jews, for example, is justifiable because it simply proves how ridiculous Borat is (and besides, Baron Cohen is Jewish)— what does all of this say about our view of foreigners? I’ve read a number of editorial pieces complaining that Borat casts non-Americans in a horrible light, suggesting they are all poor, prejudiced idiots. But to people with this reaction, did you actually watch the movie?

You see, the interesting, disturbing, and wonderful thing about it is how a good deal of the people Borat meets in the US are as bigoted as he, and if not, they come across as idiots of an entirely different variety. This film reaches amazing levels of obscenity. I don’t know Baron Cohen’s politics well enough to say whether this is really meant to be pure silliness, but nevertheless there is a scathing message lurking behind Borat’s assumptions about women, the entirely too enthusiastic response he first gets at a rodeo when he makes a bloodthirsty statement of support for the Iraq war, and many other strange incidents: whether you’re in Kazakhstan, the United States, or anywhere else, there’s plenty of intolerance to go around, so people can get down off their high patriotic horses. And that, my friends, makes Borat’s documentary anything but dumb. 📺



MOVIE SCREENINGS

Last Page
